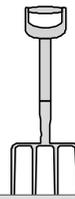
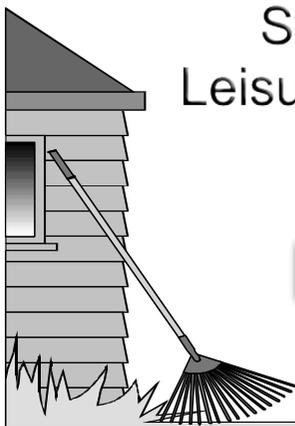


Swindon Allotments & Leisure Gardens Association

Registered Charity no. 1138814

Newsletter

Summer 2020



Horticultural show on the move

AGM News

Serious about strawberries



Top tips



& much more!

Acting Chair's Report

It is with some trepidation that I have taken over as acting chair from Marilyn, who has been such a strong and conscientious leader. I will do my best to do the role justice though I am not going to promise what Marilyn promised when she started, i.e. that she would do five years service. My excuse is that I am a little older than Marilyn was when she took over the role!

As well as Marilyn standing down, Don Reeve, who has been a stalwart of SALGA for many years (along with his late wife, Mary, who we still remember so fondly), is having a change of role and is handing over the Treasurer's role to John Edgerton, though we are not losing Don because he is going to be our President. Two other changes are that Tom Francis, who has been involved with the SALGA shop for a number of years, has decided to retire, as has Irene Cooke, our Speaker's Organiser, who is handing over to Josie Lewis. Our thanks go out to all of them for all that they have done. We have, however, several new and enthusiastic committee members, including Christine and Claire Bentley and Mick Northcott. At the time of writing, Mick is seriously ill. Our thanks for all his work and very best wishes go to him and his family at this difficult time.

What an extraordinary time we are living through. I don't think any of us could have possibly foreseen the events of the past few weeks. Even as recently as early March we were planning gardening trips and the SALGA holiday to Kent. However, events have overtaken us and we are now in the middle of a global pandemic, such as hasn't been seen – or even thought of in any serious way – for over 100 years.

In the middle of chaos it has been the most beautiful spring. The fruit trees have been bursting with blossom and it seems as though the wet winter followed by the mild spring have made us truly appreciate the nature all around us, including in our own gardens.

At the time of writing all our normal SALGA activities are curtailed due to the corona virus and we don't yet know when they will be able to resume. We are lucky that the shop is being looked after during the mandatory closure by Mick, Christine, Brian and Graham as that is our

main central point. We do have some ideas for on-line activities, including a quiz, a Gardeners Question Time, video talks and a plant swap, and you will be hearing more about these in due course. We hope you will join in if you can. I hope it won't be long before we can all do face to face meetings as well.

With best wishes to you all,

Cindy Matthews

In the meantime, take care of yourselves and here's a seasonal recipe to cheer you up.

Strawberry Mousse from the Allotment Seasonal Planner & Cook Book

225 ml double cream
400g strawberries (hulled & sliced) plus 3 to garnish
115g caster sugar
6 amaretto biscuits



Method

- Whip the cream until thick, then refrigerate
- In a pan over a low heat, toss the strawberries with the sugar until it dissolves, and the strawberries are lightly crushed. Remove from the heat and allow to cool to room temperature.
- Fold in the whipped cream
- Serve in glass dishes with the crushed biscuits sprinkled on top.



P.S. You can also buy a ready made pastry case from a supermarket, fill in with sliced strawberries and Quick Jel.

Management action in lieu of the AGM

As I knew we would be unable to hold the scheduled plant sale and AGM on 21st May, I sent out, by email, minutes of the previous year's AGM and the 2019 accounts. Hard copies of these have now been sent to members without an internet connection. The accounts have been finalised, approved by the committee and independently examined.

At the "Zoom" internet committee meeting on 7th May, Marilyn Stott chairman and Tom Francis stepped down from the committee. Don Reeve also stepped down as treasurer but said that he wanted to remain on the committee as a trustee. Nomination forms for the posts of officer and committee members had already been included in the spring newsletter and made available at the member's shop in Pickard's field.

The only nominations that have been received were for Cindy Matthews for chairman and John Edgerton for treasurer and they have now taken responsibility for those roles.

During the year the committee had been further enhanced when Mick Northcott, Christine and Claire Bentley came on board. However, regrettably, Barbara Rawle had stepped down in November. Up to date contact details of all the people in post can be found on the back page of the newsletter.

The committee would like to thank Marilyn for her guidance during her time as chairman and to Don for his meticulous bookkeeping. We also thank Barbara for making the tea and coffee on so many occasions and for catering at many Potato Days and annual shows. Tom was a much-valued member of the team at the shop and will be missed. We hope that all of them continue to keep in touch and look forward to seeing them at monthly meetings as and when we can re-commence.

Sue Stevens

The Treasurer hangs up his calculator at last

Each SALGA accounting year runs from 1st January through to the 31st December and the final accounts for each year are then examined and approved in time to be presented to the Annual General Meeting in May. John Edgerton kindly agreed to stand for election if I resigned at this year's AGM and he actually took over responsibility in January, leaving me just to finish off the 2019 accounts and get them approved.



I had even written a rough draft of my resignation speech for last month's AGM, but corona virus has robbed me of my moment of glory. So I'll tell you what I was going to say anyway!

In June, when I was sixteen, I left school before the end of term because I got a job as a trainee accountant with Surrey County Council. There were no computers although we had "punched card machines" which recorded and sorted thousands of transactions, printing the results on reams of paper. Accountants then pored over the results before using their Swan or Conway Stewart fountain pens to enter them in huge loose-leaf ledgers known as thong binders. That may sound, to you, like something from the wardrobe room of Love Island, but we didn't have T.V. in those days and in any case Mary Whitehouse would have soon stopped that.

Meanwhile, us trainees checked suppliers' invoices before they were paid, or scurried about finding documents for the accountants, sometimes even going to the tobacconists to replenish their supplies. Not being a train spotter at school, I didn't even know Swindon existed until I had to check the invoices for the supply of Surrey Constabulary uniforms. These were made by a Swindon company, possibly called Compton's?

Less than two years later I was doing my National Service with an infantry regiment in Germany, part of the allied occupation forces in those days. Even there, after about five months basic and weapons training I moved into HQ Company office where my duties included the payroll and control of the cigarette ration tickets. U.K. cigarettes could only be purchased at the NAAFI in those days. They cost a shilling for twenty, 5p in today's

money. A ration was 100 per man per week, later increased to 120. Cigarettes gave me my first insight into the workings of the black market. After “demob” I heard on the Territorial Army grapevine that my fag ration successor had ended up in the military prison in Bielefeld. So either he didn’t have the makings of an accountant or he got too greedy!

Back in paid employment I moved around before coming to Swindon in 1967 where I encountered my first computer. It was probably less powerful than the pocket calculators you can buy these days for less than ten quid and it quite often broke down. I’ve remained in Swindon ever since, giving up paid employment 45 years, almost to the day, from when I left school.



By retirement I’d already become embroiled in the voluntary sector, taking on the treasurers’ role in various organisations. A couple had turnover running into several millions but mostly much more modest. However, it wasn’t until 2009 that I took on the SALGA accounts although I’ve been on the committee since 1993.

SALGA was a busy organisation in 2009. The secretary, Sylvia Gardiner was running two holidays a year, one in the spring plus a “Turkey and Tinsel”. She also organised more day trips than we have now. Like today we had the usual monthly speakers, Christmas social and annual horticultural show. Despite all this activity there were financial problems. The 2008 accounts had shown a deficit of over £700. Moreover, the shop building was decaying and the storage sheds all leaked. Some of the shop stock was waiting write off because it was water damaged or polluted with rat droppings. Finally, the reserves were negligible and there was no financial plan for the future.

Now, eleven years later, I’m really pleased with what we’ve achieved. In addition to the work put in by the committee there has been a loyal band of volunteers in the background that have helped to make it all possible. So it’s tempting to hang on as treasurer. But I’ve been doing accounts for seventy-two years now, which is surely long enough. So all that remains is for me to tell you how 2019 turned out and the position at 31st December, 2019.

Total income for the year was £45,784. Of this, £5,882 comprised “restricted grants”, meaning we can only spend them on the purposes for which they were given. In our case this was for improvements at Pickards Field shop including land drainage, disabled access and the Portaloo. £5,110 of this was spent during the year leaving a balance of £772 which I’ve carried forward as part of our “building renewal reserve”.

Our usual run-of-the-mill activities brought in £39,902. There were modest increases in membership fees, gift aid, donations and bank interest. Shop sales rose by £1,633 to £13,187 with a surplus on sales of £1,378, better than we’ve ever done before. There was a small increase in the surplus on the annual holiday and day trips compared to 2019 and we benefitted greatly from Rachel and John Monniot providing a quiz for free Christmas entertainment. Total spending was £36,390. More shop stock to meet increase sales and double the previous year’s spending on printing, stationery, the web site and other publicity are the only increases worth mentioning. The overall surplus for the year was £3,512, up from £2,120 in 2018.



Finally, is SALGA in good shape? Well, I think the answer’s yes! Apart from the new storage containers and much improved drainage, etc. at Pickards Field members’ shop, we’d got £2,412 set aside at the year end for further improvement work. In addition there was £14,347 in general reserves of which just under half was tied up in stock for sale in 2020.

And with that I sign off.

Don Reeve



2020 Horticultural Show

Pinetrees Community Centre

Saturday 5th September 2020

As I write this, we are in uncertain times with the Covid 19 lockdown continuing. I hope you are all safe and well. I have been using my exercise time while being furloughed to dig and plant my allotment which now looks the best it has in many years and has been planted with lots of fresh vegetables. In the current climate they may be quite useful and certainly will be tasty later in the year.

The Show Committee has started to plan for the annual show for this year but whether it can happen will depend on government guidelines and your safety at the time. A decision will be taken nearer the actual Show date, so all the Committee can do is prepare as we would normally and ask that you do the same, ready for the Show date of September 5th 2020.



After many happy years at Gorse Hill Community Centre, this year we are moving to a new venue at the Pinetrees Community Centre which is located off The Circle, Pinehurst and we hope everybody will continue to support us in this new home.

The parking facilities for the exhibitors and public are much better here as they are behind and in front of the Centre and we hope this will further enhance this year's Show plus we will still have our teas and coffee available along with homemade cakes (any donations of cakes will be a great help). Sadly, after many years of service in the kitchen Barbara Rawle and Jean Dann have decided to stand down. For this year's Show my wife Sandra Carter and sister Christine Straford have agreed to step into their shoes. As in previous years the hall will be open early for the setting up of exhibits (times to be confirmed) and the public will be able to gain admission from 2.30pm free of charge to view the displays. We hope to have Ben Prater from BBC Wiltshire Sound returning to the Show to hand out all the awards for the lucky winners on the day and also the winning raffle prizes. The Show will consist of all the same classes as in

previous years, from flowers and vegetables to bread and cake making, to name a few and these will also include the group's and children's categories. We are introducing a new class in the domestic section – 6 sausage rolls, so get practising.

I know in the current climate things are quite uncertain and the Committee will only do what we feel is right for our members and plan accordingly. We will let you know in due course via email and other communication methods of any changes.

We are still looking for members to join the Show Committee to help with the planning, and organisation on the day of the Show, if not for this year but future Shows. If any member feels they can spare a little time to join the Committee then please speak to myself or any other Show Committee member.



Now is the time to think about what you need to plant not just for the Show, but what you can produce for your own table. It always tastes better when you have grown and picked your own produce for the table. You never know how good they will turn out and we would love to see you at the Pinetrees Community Centre this year if we can go ahead.



Mick Carter

Serious about Strawberries



These days in gardens and on allotments I see strawberries growing in troughs, hanging from “portholes” in the side of tubs or growing in ground which is covered in plastic sheet. I say to myself, “They’re strawberries, not trough berries or plastic berries”, although some of those sold in supermarkets have so little taste they could well be plastic berries.

The supermarkets, of course, are obliged to sell varieties that travel well and have a “good shelf life”, whereas for most of the forty-seven years I gardened in Swindon I grew Cambridge Favourites which are best eaten on the day they are picked. They all came from a dozen healthy plants that I bought at a garden centre for £1 each.

For best results the strawberry growing year starts in the summer, just after picking the last of the year’s crop. First, take away the straw. Some gardeners recommend burning the straw in situ round the plants, to help clear pests and diseases. However, sometimes a couple of toads are hidden in it and they’re too valuable to kill, so take the straw away but burn it anyway in case it’s harbouring disease.

Once the straw’s out the way you can see whether there are enough runners to propagate sufficient new plants. If not, more will grow in a week or two. Strawberries grow the largest fruit in the first year. The second year may yield slightly more berries, but slightly smaller. Thereafter it’s all downhill. So, to discard the twice-fruited plants you will need replacements for half the number in the bed, more if you want to enlarge it. In addition there may be a few once-fruited plants that don’t appear to have thrived. Plan to replace those as well. Also, some propagations may fail, so you’ll need a few “spares”.

Again being mindful of quality, use only the strongest looking runners from the best plants and propagate at the first leaf growth only to produce one new plant per runner. But never use more than two from the same plant. Fully sink a small pot into the soil for each selected runner, filled with decent compost. Position the leaf growth over the compost, take off any side shoots growing from it peg and it down with a piece of bent wire

bent into a J shape. Then lop off the rest of the runner just before the second leaf growth. This way all the energy of the parent plant is concentrated on feeding the new plant you're trying to grow. It's like an umbilical cord really.

Once this job is complete you can take out all the remaining, unused runners. But take great care not to cut through any "umbilical cords". By sinking the pots in the ground you've obviated the need for watering. So all you need to do for the next month or so is take off any new runners that appear, otherwise they will simply waste the plants' energy.

The new potted plants should be ready to plant out in mid to late September. Many should have roots coming out the bottom of the pots. Cut through the runners before lifting them. They must be planted on fresh land, ideally adjacent to that end of the existing plot which has fruited only once. This constant moving to fresh ground helps to avoid the many diseases that attack strawberry plants and build up in the soil. Also by keeping the size and shape of the bed constant, it means that the bird protection used this year just needs "to be moved along a bit". The new bed should be free from weeds, particularly perennials, and with some fertilizer added. Something that helps to retain moisture is ideal in all but the wettest of soils. It doesn't need to be deep as strawberries are shallow rooted. Any poor looking plants within the once-fruited part of the old bed can be replaced at the same time and, finally the twice-fruited plants can be dug out and burned, again reducing the risk of harbouring disease.

Earlier I spoke about moving the bird protection, but it isn't needed in its new location until the following spring. I always left the bird "cage" where it was to protect the spring cabbage plants I always set out where the old strawberries had been. I say cage but the sides were only 18 inches high. It was 4 feet wide and 16 feet long, each side comprising two 8 foot long panels. The "lids" were panels as well which could be lifted off for easy picking from either side. It held 48 plants in three rows of sixteen. We used a lot of strawberries, partly because Mary always wanted about fifteen pounds for jam.

One final task at this stage is to "tidy up" the plants that have fruited once by clearing the bed of weeds and cutting off all the old leaves. Burn those too. Then rake in a top dressing of Growmore, being mindful of the

shallow roots. Thereafter, throughout the winter, simply keep an eye on the plants and lop off any runners that may appear.

The spring cabbages will out-grow the strawberry cage once they start to mature, so move it on after Christmas.

In early March give the whole strawberry bed a top dressing of potash at an ounce per square yard. Kill any slugs that show up and keep it free from weeds and any runners. The straw is put down when the plants flower and begin to form fruit. Before doing so, water each plant individually. Take the rose off the can and water directly on to each plant crown. Then scatter slug pellets liberally round the plants.

The straw goes down on top of the pellets. Carefully lift the fruit and flowers and tuck the straw underneath so that the fruit will be held up off the soil and in full sun. Ideally you should have enough straw to cover all the bed, so that no soil is visible. Once the straw is down the bird cage tops need to go back on, particularly if you have starlings in the area. They'll nick most of your straw for nesting! Also, you may otherwise find next door's cat bedding down in there.

That's about it really. Once the harvest is over, it's back to square one and start again.

Finally, a couple of notes from the kitchen:-



Strawberries are low on pectin and it's difficult to get jam to set. By adding some green, unripe gooseberries to the fruit you get a much better set without making much difference to the taste.

Strawberries turn to "mush" when frozen. However, sponge flans filled with strawberries set in a firm jelly stand up to freezing reasonably well and provide the occasional winter treat. I think slices were served in the old BHS restaurant.



Don Reeve

Tips from old gardeners

Using herbs in the vegetable garden.

Plant sage, thyme or rosemary around cabbages. Borage helps strawberries thrive and marigolds secrete an insect repellent that will protect many plants. Parsley encourages bees and protects asparagus, beans and carrots.



Never sow seeds when the moon is waning.



Is this an old wives' tale? Scientific research has come up with some corroboration of this. Lunar fluctuations affect the earth's magnetic field causing all water to move in almost tidal fashion. This makes significant rainfall statistically more likely after a new moon. Therefore if you sow your seeds after the full moon, they should get a good shower or two to help their germination.

Giving seeds a hot shower

Cover the seeds and then put hot water in a can with a fine rose and sprinkle it along the drill. Follow this up an hour later with a sprinkling of lukewarm water. This is to give the seeds a good start by encouraging early germination. It's often particularly difficult to get parsley to germinate.



Try pouring boiling water straight from the kettle into the seed drill and then immediately put the seeds directly on top. Some people say put the seeds in first and pour the boiling water over them, but that seems a bit drastic!

What beans like best



Beans love plenty of good, cool moisture at their roots. One way to achieve this is to put a layer or two of newspaper under them in the trench along with some manure or compost. If available, you could add some hair to the trench. Human or horse hair, it doesn't matter as both contain valuable minerals.

Unusual things to help plants grow



Roses like it if you dig in old banana skins just below the surface. The skins contain phosphate, calcium, sulphur, sodium and magnesium. New roses benefit from having a wedge of cooking lard beneath the roots.

Brassicac like a drop of beer as do tall flowers like hollyhocks and delphiniums.



Fill your empty milk container with water and use this on house plants and climbers that are growing against the wall.

Tea leaves are good for azaleas, rhododendrons and camelias.



If you have compost, but no ericaceous compost, you can - according to the RHS - add a water and vinegar mix to what you have. Probably need to be careful not to overdo the vinegar!

Peaches and nectarines are said to benefit from having meat planted round the roots. So any rats or mice that you've trapped can be laid to rest there.

PICKARDS FIELD MEMBERS' SHOP

The shop stayed open on Saturdays only all through our usual winter months closure and re-opened fully with a bit of a celebration on the 23rd February. Then Corona virus arrived but it didn't deter Mick Northcott and his team and they have managed to serve members throughout the lockdown.

THE SHOP IS NOW OPEN, Saturday, Sunday and Monday mornings, as in the past. So come along and pick up all you need, renew your membership if you haven't already but take care not to crowd up together. Stay Alert, as the PM says!

Childhood Reminiscences

When I was a child gran's cottage was in a magic place. For a start her widowed neighbour had a parrot, so I realised she'd been married to a pirate. The cottage looked out on to a large grassed area with a pond, beyond which was heath land. As well as birds, heather, gorse, silver birch and pine, it was home to squirrels, rabbits, snakes and lizards. So there was always plenty to keep a country kid and his dog occupied.

One day before I started school, gran and I were out on the heath, with our dogs, collecting fir cones for fire lighting. We each had a sack. Gran was wearing her big wrap-around overall and I had my cap on. A "proper cap", with the crown fastened to the peak with a press stud. This made a "secret pocket" for things like gob stoppers, matches and bird's egg.

By the road on the far side we heard a car coming. Cars were rare in those days so we naturally went and watched. Then we could see there were two, really large black ones! Suddenly gran said "It's the king, take your hat off" and snatched my cap from my head. I turned to her and saw she was holding out her pinny and kind of squatting down, (mum later explained she was curtseying). Before I turned back the cars whizzed past so I didn't see any of the passengers.

Afterwards, gran was full of it. She told everyone, "It was the king. He saw me you know and he waved". Looking back I always think of it as "the day I nearly saw the king". It was probably Edward on his way to lunch in the officers' mess at the nearby army camp.



Don Reeve

SALGA Officers & Committee Members

Acting Chairman

Cindy Matthews, 28, Tithe Barn Crescent, SN1 4JX. 01793 644388

Secretary

Sue Stevens, 25, Ryan Close, Sparcells, SN5 5WA. 01793 881198

Acting Treasurer

John Edgerton, 29, Beverley, Toothill, SN5 8BH. 01793 642965

Membership Secretary

Denis Matthews, 28, Tithe Barn Crescent, SN1 4JX. 01793 644388

General Committee Members

Christine Bentley, 10 Cornwall Avenue, SN2 1PF. 01793 539780

Claire Bentley, 10 Cornwall Avenue, SN2 1PF. 01793 539780

Sue Camburn, 49, Whitecastle, Toothill, SN5 8HY. 01793 341482

Viv Dipper, 61, Kitchener Street, Swindon, SN2 1EZ. 01793 322421

Josie Lewis, 4, Elcombe Av., Wroughton, SN4 9EL. 01793 845154

Mick Northcott, 23 Tulip Tree Close, SN2 1PR. 07552 215897

Don Reeve, 7, The Pinnacle, Horder Mews, SN1 3ED. 01793 423918

Gordon Staples, 14, Northern Road, SN2 1NU. 01793 538553

Show Committee Chairman

Mick Carter, 114, Pinehurst Road, SN2 1RJ. 07769 721739

Acting Secretary

Glenys Dingwall, 5, Applegrove House,
Belmont Crescent, Swindon, SN1 4DD 01793 274653

The main committee meets on the first Thursday of every month. Please contact the secretary, Sue Stevens, with anything that you feel should be brought to its attention.

The show committee usually meets in December to consider any possible changes to the schedule of show categories and then again from May or June onwards until a review after the event, in September. These meetings are held on the second Thursday of the month and they are looking for new members.